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Ray Seeks Backing of Black Leaders for New Trial, Talks to House Group

By STEVE HAGEY

PETROS (UPI) — James Earl Ray, the convicted killer of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., talked to four members of the House Assassinations Committee Friday and said later he is asking black leaders to back his bid for a new trial.

In a rare interview after the committee members left Brushy Mountain State Prison, Ray renewed his claim that he did not kill King and said he was sending letters to "every major black leader in America" asking them to pressure the Federal Government into allowing him a new trial.

"No," he said when asked if he killed King. "I've never said anyone pulled the trigger. I didn't. Who did is not my responsibility."

Ray pleaded guilty to the April 1968 slaying of King in Memphis, but, shortly after receiving a 99-year sentence, he began proclaiming his innocence and asking for a new trial — so far without success.

He and his latest attorney, Mark Lane, said Ray would testify before the House Assassinations Committee Aug. 16, 17 and 18. They said Ray spent about three hours Friday with Committee Chairman Rep. Louis B. Stokes (D-Ohio), three other committee members and committee staff members.

Lane said most of the session was devoted to discussing the format of testimony and making other arrangements, including those for a lie detector test to be administered at the prison hospital here before his trip to Washington.

Ray, who has taken at least three other lie detector tests and failed at least two of them, said, "I don't consider the polygraph to be important. I don't think it will be decisive."

Ray said committee members did ask him briefly about a picture he claims to have of the mysterious "Raoul," the man Ray claims he was working for in Memphis and who may have set him up to take the blame for the King slaying.

Ray was reluctant to discuss the picture or how it was obtained, saying only that it was of a man about 35 to 45 years old and that it was not a "mug shot."

Lane and Ray said Ray's letters to black leaders would be sent out Friday. They showed newsmen a copy of one addressed to United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young.

The letter began "I did not kill Martin Luther King Jr." and closed by saying, "since Memphis is a lot closer than Moscow, I ask you to meet with President Carter and ask him to request that I be given a trial.

"At that trial, I am sure I will be able to prove that I am innocent and the secret FBI files which you will see at that trial will lead to the real murderer. Those trials in Moscow may be unfair and completely political. But at least the defendants there have a trial . . . Now I ask you to help me get one."

In addition to Stokes, committee members at the prison Friday included Reps. Hal Sawyer (R-Mich.), Sam Devine (R-Ohio) and Bob Edgar (D-Pa.). It was the eighth meeting Ray has had with House investigators.

Lane said he would be moving to Memphis soon as part of a stepped-up effort to win Ray a new trial. He said Ray's brother, Jerry, who was also at the prison Friday, would live with him.

Lane said the committe members agreed "that James can make an opening statement of up to one hour.

"We asked that he be able to be confronted by his accusers, but they said 'No'," he said.